

"ABIDING IN CHRIST."

A SERMON

FOR THE NEW YEAR,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF St. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, HURON COLLEGE,

AND IN

CHRIST CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,

On Sunday, January 2nd, 1870,

BY THE

REV. ISAAC BROCK, M. A.

Queen's College, Oxford.

**Principal and Divinity Professor of Huron College, and Incumbent of Christ Church,
Westminster.**

**E. A. TAYLOR, RICHMOND STREET,
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John xv: 4. "Abide in Me."

Through the good hand of our God over us, we are permitted to gather together in the Sanctuary of the Lord, on the first Lord's day of another of our earthly years. A year of mingled joy and sorrow has passed away ; a year wherein some of us have had to sing of both judgment and mercy. And now we have turned over a leaf in the great book of time, we have entered on a new year—and naturally we ask, what shall it bring forth ? What events are stored up for us in its unknown future ? Happily it is not for us to know. But this we know, that our times are in our Father's loving hand, and that He, even when He tries us, does all things well. Let us stay ourselves, dear friends, on this assurance, and look forward trustfully and hopefully.

And now, without further preface let me ask you to consider with me the text which I have chosen for our congregational watch-word for 1870. Throughout its hours, and

days, and months ; throughout its joys and sorrows ; throughout its cares and burdens ; may it ring in our ears, may it dwell in our hearts, may it influence our lives.

I. " Abide in Me." *Who is the speaker of these words ?*

A face exceeding beautiful, fairer than the children of men, yet marred by no common grief, chastened by no ordinary sorrow, speaketh them. A man, He seems conversing with His fellow-men. A human teacher He appears amid the little band of His disciples. And yet what man, what human teacher, dare speak and teach like Him ? Who like Him, dare beckon all men to Himself, and then bid them having come, abide in Him ? Who of human teachers could say to all mankind, ' Come to Me,'—I will give you rest ? Who to His disciples could say, ' Abide in Me,'—I am your life ?

Could Socrates, or Zoroaster, or Confucius, or Mahomet ? Could St. Paul, or St. John, St. Chrysostom, or St. Augustine ? Could Loyola, or Xavier, or Liguori ? Could Luther, or Calvin, or Cranmer ? Could Wesley, or Romaine, or McCheyne ? Nay brethren, no human teacher, Heathen or Christian, Papal or Protestant, Nonconform-

ist or Churchman, could invite all mankind to himself for rest, or command all his disciples to abide in him for life. From any human teacher, such language as "Come to Me," "Abide in Me," would sound most unnatural and exaggerated; and yet on the lips of Jesus of Nazareth who spoke them, they sound but the natural utterances of sobriety and truth.

Was He then a mere man? a merely human teacher? Nay, man He was—truly man—for He became incarnate, as we have just commemorated in our Christmas festival, and it was no phantom body that He took when He was made flesh, and dwelt among us. He became a real though a sinless man, but though man, He was God too; "God over all blessed for ever." He was, as the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world confesses, and as Holy Scripture teaches, "God manifest in the flesh." Yes brethren, a truly divine, though a truly human Christ is our teacher. Hence we wonder not at the authoritative words of the text, "Abide in Me." They are natural, they are looked for from the lips of Jesus, because as Son of God, He is our Lord and our God. But if His Godhead invests them with authority,

His manhood clothes them with winning tenderness. No far distant Deity speaketh here, 'tis Jesus Son of Mary who converses with us as friend with friend. Our brother says, "Abide in Me," and we are drawn, we are melted by the tenderness of His human love and human sympathy. Our God says, "Abide in Me," and our wayward hearts are constrained to listen to His authoritative voice.

II. I pass to a second enquiry: *When did Jesus Christ speak these words?*

The night before He was crucified; yea a few short hours only, before He was arrested by His foes; the Holy Supper was over; Judas had gone out on his errand of darkness and treachery; the upper room where the last typical passover had been eaten was soon to be left; for the "Arise let us go hence," with which the previous chapter closes, indicates an approaching change of scene; Gethsemane's olive-shaded garden would soon be reached; the time of His agony was close at hand; the vision of His cross was over-shadowing His soul; His sufferings, death, and burial were immediately coming on; and yet He says, "Abide

in Me.” Think of the force of these words as unfolded by their surrounding context—think of these circumstances connected with them—and do you not see in them an indirect but striking prophecy of the resurrection and exaltation of the Speaker ?

Of what avail would be abiding in a dead Christ ? What power would He possess for the succour of His people ? How would He then be the living Vine, giving life to the branches, the source at once of their growth and fruitfulness ? When therefore Jesus said, “ Abide in Me,” He looked beyond His bitter cross, and silent grave, and sojourn in Hades, to His glorious resurrection and triumphant ascension, and prevailing intercession at the right hand of the Father.

II. A third enquiry arises : *To whom were these words spoken ?*

First to the faithful eleven. The traitor is gone ; Christ could no longer say, as once He said in sadness, “ Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil ?” No. Those around our Lord now were not only called and chosen, but faithful. Yes, in spite of all their failings and imperfections, which the next few hours would so vividly

depict, they were loyal. In a few moments their omniscient Lord, in His prayer to His Father, would speak of them thus : “ I have manifested thy Name, unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world ; thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me ; and they have kept Thy Word ; and they have believed that Thou didst send Me.” Jesus read the hearts of the little sorrowing band around Him ; and He can speak of them thus in His high priestly prayer. The words of my text then, spoken in the first instance to the faithful eleven, were spoken to true believers ; weak doubtless as yet, far from being established in the faith, but still true.

The faithful Apostles represent those to whom the Master speaks the words of my text now. He speaks then to believers, to those who amid all their short-comings, and failures, and sins, have given their hearts to Him, who in answer to Jesu’s searching question, “ Lovest thou Me ? ” with Peter can say, “ Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee ” To such Jesus says now, “ Abide in Me.”

In the very nature of the case, it is evident that only to such can Jesus speak such words. For what does abiding in Christ

imply? Clearly that we have already come to Him. Hence believers only can be asked to abide in Christ. Others have yet to come to Him, to give themselves to Him by faith, to surrender their own hearts to Him. But those who have come, those who by the grace of God have obeyed the Master's first word to wandering weary sinners, "Come unto Me," are asked, yea lovingly entreated, to remain. Jesus does not wish them to wander away from the embraces of His love, and therefore to His own believing people, who have come to trust under the shadow of His wings, He says, "Abide in Me."

IV. We are conducted now to a fourth enquiry; *Why does Jesus ask His believing people to abide in Him?*

(1.) First, because He loves them. Jesus loves all poor sinners of mankind. This love brought Him from heaven to earth. The story of Bethlehem, the story of Nazareth, above all the story of Calvary, is the "Old, old story of Jesus, and His love." This love led Jesus in His lowliness, this love leads Him still in His Father's glory to say to poor weary sinners, "Come unto Me, I will give you rest."

Dear fellow-sinners here, who have not yet come, Jesus loves you, He died for you, He pleads for you on His throne in the heavenly Zion—that you have been spared to see 1870 is in answer to His pleadings. Will you go on resisting divine love, turning a deaf ear to your beckoning Saviour? Oh, why will you die? Why live as if you had no souls to save? Shall Jesus have to say to some of you what He had to say to some of old, “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life?”

Do not tell me that in a dying hour you hope to come to Christ. Then reason may have forsaken her throne; or prostrating weakness, or racking pain, may render all serious thought impossible. Nay, delay not under any pretext, sinners out of Christ to flee for refuge; delay not lest your day of probation close in darkness; delay not lest a long-suffering God summon you to an account for your neglected opportunities, your slighted mercies, your wasted blessings. How unutterably sad it will be for you to have to say hereafter, as you look back on a past which cannot be recalled, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” Oh, dear fellow-sinners,

again I remind you, Jesus loves you. Do you still doubt it? Then ponder over the the mystery of His holy incarnation; think of His holy nativity and circumcision; His baptism, fasting and temptation; His agony and blood sweat; His cross and passion; His precious death and burial; His glorious resurrection and ascension; and His sending of the Holy Ghost. All this He undertook for you. Will you not then turn to Him in penitence? Will you not seek Him now by faith? Or, will you allow Him to go on calling you in vain? Will you slight the love which now says, "Come unto Me?" Then I must affectionately but most plainly warn you, that that very love which now invites, which now says "Come," will hereafter say "Depart," "Depart from Me, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Yes, love to prevent further manifestations of rebellion, to restrain further developments of sin in those who would not be won to holiness by the Cross, love to the lost shall compel the execution of that sentence of the judgment throne. Love to those who would not be saved, shall leave for them no other alternative but the realm of eternal torment, whererebellion and resistance

as they will be hopeless shall be unknown, for
as our living Milton has sung,

“Passive submission is the law of hell.”*

But, my brethren, if our Jesus loves sinners who are still wandering far from Him, much more does He love His own. If He loved Judas, much more did He love St. John. The former He loved with divine compassion, the latter He loved with divine complacency. And because He thus loves His people, because He loves them as He loved John the beloved, He says to them, “Abide in Me.” For His own sake then, and for theirs too as we shall see, He thus entreats His loved ones. His heart is knit to them, as it was to the inmates of Bethany’s favoured home, and therefore He does not want them to leave Him; He prizes their companionship. True, He has in His high

* This is a quotation from a poem in twelve Books, by the Rev. E. H. Bokersteth, M. A., entitled, “Yesterday, To-Day and For Ever.” In the hope that some in Canada will purchase, and thoughtfully peruse this wonderful poem, I append the subjects of the different books :

I. The Seer’s Death and Descent to Hades.

II. The Paradise of the Blessed Dead.

III. The Prison of the Lost.

IV. The Creation of Angels and Men.

V. The Fall of Angels and Men.

VI. The Empire of Darkness.

VII. Redemption.

VIII. The Church Militant.

IX. The Bridal of the Lamb.

X. The Millennial Sabbath.

XI. The Last Judgment.

XII. The Many Mansions.

court on the heavenly Zion the beloved society of His Eternal Father, and the Ever Blessed Spirit, and the converse with myriads of holy angels, who do His commandments, and hearken unto the voice of His Word. True, whenever He walks through the bowers and gardens of His Paradise of the blessed dead, He has the companionship of multitudes of His redeemed, who are safe in their home with Jesus ; but for all this, He would not lose the companionship of one of His dear children still in the Church Militant ; all, all are needed to fill His cup of joy, to complete His jewelled diadem, to accomplish the number of His elect. Each one therefore He loves with divine solicitude, and hence to each of His beloved people on earth, He says, “ Abide in Me.”

(2.) But again, Jesus asks His people to abide in Him, because He wants them to be holy. Mark the words that follow. “ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without Me, (or severed from Me,) ye can do nothing.”

Jesus desires his people to be fruitful in good works; He wants them to be holy. But this, Jesus explains to us in this parable of the Vine, is impossible unless we abide in Him. As well might you expect a branch cut off from the vine to bring forth fruit, as a sinner out of Christ to be holy. The severed branch must be engrafted, the sap in the tree must rise into the graft, then it will live, living it will bring forth fruit, and the pruning hand of the skillful husbandman will make it bring forth more fruit.

Thus it is with us. We live only as united to Christ. Engrafted into Him who is our Life, we live. Living we will bring forth fruit. And our Father who is the Husbandman will, if need be, try us that we may bring forth more fruit.

And here, brethren, I would have you note, that this fruitfulness, this holiness of heart and life, is the evidence that our abiding in Christ is real. There is an abiding in Christ which is only outward and nominal. To it our Lord refers when He says, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, My Father taketh away." Such is the case with a great many baptized Christians. By Holy Baptism they have been engrafted into Christ.

They are "members of Christ," branches in Him the true Vine. The ligatures and bands of an outward profession unite them to Christ. But there is no inward and living union, and the absence of fruit attests the want of this real union. The doom of these fruitless branches is predicted by our Lord. They are taken away by the Heavenly Husbandman ; their outward union is dissolved ; and then what follows further ? Jesus says, " If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Such in a cared-for vineyard is the end of the fruitless branches of a vine. Is there no foreshadowing here of the end of nominal Christians ? In the cared-for vineyard of God's Church think you that they will be allowed for ever to cumber the ground with their fruitless boughs ? Nay, a time of excision, long delayed perhaps, will come at last. Angels not men, acting under God's command will gather out of His kingdom, all things that offend, and them that do iniquity ; and angels, the executors of Jehovah's judgments, will cast these fruitless branches into the unquenchable fire.

Are then any of you, my brethren, resting

satisfied with the fact of your being outwardly Christ's, thinking that because you have been baptized, and confirmed, and because you come regularly to Church and to the Lord's table, that you are all right? It is well that you avail yourselves regularly and punctually of all the means of grace. It is well if you do not allow frivolous excuses to keep you from the House of prayer. It is well if you are here when divine service begins, if you do not show disrespect to the God of the Sanctuary, and disregard to the feelings of your fellow-worshippers, by coming in late into God's house. It is well if you join heartily and audibly in the responsive service of our Church, instead of keeping your lips shut like mutes, or just moving them as if you were afraid to be heard joining in the public worship of Almighty God. It is well if you all join according to your ability in our service of song, instead of leaving all the singing to the choir, forgetting that their duty is to lead not monopolize the singing. It is well if you listen attentively to the sermon, remembering that the minister is God's ambassador, sent from God with a message to your souls. It is well if you come in the spirit, the Church invites to the

table of your Lord. But remember my friends, that though these things accompany true religion, the essence of true religion consists in something deeper, even in a real abiding in Christ. Unless by a living faith we are in Christ, we may have the form of godliness, but we shall lack its vital power.

The evidence of this real abiding in Christ will be the bringing forth of fruit. Do you ask what fruit? We are at no loss to answer, for the fruit of the living branches of the true Vine has been analysed by the Holy Spirit, and in the best specimens nine ingredients are found. — Love, — Joy, — Peace, — Long-Suffering, — Gentleness, — Goodness, — Faith, — Meekness, — Temperance. These are the fruits of abiding in Christ. These fruits Jesus desires to see abounding in our lives, that His Father may be glorified, and hence He earnestly entreats us to abide in Him.

(3.) But again, He thus entreats us, because He wants us to be happy. Immediately after this parable of the Vine and the branches, by which we are taught the necessity of abiding in Christ, our Lord says, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your

joy may be full." Yes, Jesus wants His people to be happy, to be filled with joy—joy real and enduring. He would fain see them rejoicing in His love. Happy in the full enjoyment of the blessings which He has purchased for them by His passion. Happy in Him now as His pardoned children. Happy with Him hereafter in His Paradise of the blessed dead. Happy with Him in the day of His second Advent, in His future kingdom on earth, and in the many mansions of "Jerusalem the golden."

And because He wants His people to be happy He craves them to abide in Him. Only thus can they be safe, and therefore only thus can they be happy. None knew this better than our prescient Lord, whose eye looked across the brief years of time, into the measureless ages of eternity. His eye took in at one glance the misery of the lost, the happiness of the saved. He knew full well that the saved would be those who were found abiding in Him : and therefore, not only that we might be happy in this short life, but above all that we might be happy in the never-ending life to come, He tenderly entreats us as our brother, He solemnly commands as our God to abide in Him.

Jesus loves us. Jesus wants us to be holy. Jesus seeks our happiness now and for ever ; —hence He says to His believing people, “ Abide in Me.”

V. Do you ask now ; *How shall we abide in Christ ?*

First, as I have already shown, we must come to Him by faith. There can be no real abiding in Christ without a living faith in Him—a faith which appropriates Jesus Christ as our own Saviour—a faith which will enable each one of us to say with St. Paul, “ Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me.” This faith is the gift of God. Do you lack it ? Then seek it by earnest prayer. God says, “ Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find.” But, be in earnest, be in earnest, I beseech you. It is a question of life and death.

Doubt not God’s promises. He has promised to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask. Go to Him then in private prayer. Let not this first Lord’s day of another year close without earnest pleadings at the throne of mercy for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost. He will bring you to Christ in penitence and faith, under His persua-

sive influence you will obey the first word of your Lord, "Come unto Me."

And then having come to Christ by faith, and through the gracious teaching of the Spirit, you need the continuous teaching of the same Spirit to lead you to abide in Christ. He who first shows us our need of Jesus, by discovering to us our helplessness and ruin, shows us also our continued need of Jesus by enlarged knowledge of ourselves, and fuller unfoldings of "The unsearchable riches of Christ." First, the Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus, and this leads us to come to Him. Then He glorifies Jesus, and this leads us to abide in Him.

Hence, if we would abide in Christ, we need the constant presence and teaching of the Holy Spirit. And this must be sought by daily prayer.

But further, if we would abide in Christ, we must diligently use all the helps and means of grace which our Father has appointed. Private prayer I have already alluded to as one means. I am sure, brethren, that there can be no abiding in Christ unless we cultivate a habit of private prayer. By prayer we hold converse with our Lord, and this to every true Christian, to every-

one therefore who is abiding in Christ, will not be a painful duty, but an unspeakably delightful privilege. And as we speak to our Lord in prayer, so on the other hand, when we read His Holy Word, we hear Him speaking to us. Hence the devotional study of God's Word is another most important aid to a real abiding in Christ. I speak of the devotional study of the Word, because we may study it critically, (and those who are to teach others must study it thus); or we may study it intellectually, as food for the mind; or we may read it as an unwelcome duty, to satisfy conscience; and all the while we may miss the devotional study of God's Word, that study which will lead us to come to the Word with delight as the food of our souls, as testifying to us of Christ and His love.

And while those who desire to abide in Christ, will not neglect private means of grace—neither will they neglect the public means. If health and home duties allow they will come not occasionally, but regularly to the Lord's house. And heads of families who wish to abide in Christ themselves, will naturally desire their children to follow their example, and instead of encouraging them to remain at home on the

Lord's day, they will bring them with them to the house of the Lord, and teach them by word and good example to seek the Lord early

And those who having come to Christ, would abide in Him, will certainly not neglect the most blessed of all the Church's ordinances, the Holy Communion of Christ's body and blood. As no ordinance brings the faithful nearer to Christ, so I believe no ordinance is a greater help to us, (if we come to it in the spirit the Church directs,) in the matter of our abiding in Christ. This certainly is the teaching of our Church. She says, "the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy Sacrament; for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us."

Would ye then, my brethren, abide in Christ? Then come to Him by faith as ruined sinners, surrender yourselves to Him, seek day by day the teaching of the Spirit of Jesus, cultivate habits of private prayer and of the devotional study of the Scriptures. Be regular in your attendance in the Sanctuary, and at the table of your Lord.

VI. A closing enquiry suggests itself; *What motive should urge us all to abide in Christ ?*

I will not recur to some which have been already mentioned ; but I will refer to one which the beloved St. John urges in his Epistle when he affectionately presses believers to abide in Christ. He thus writes, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." The blessed hope of Christ's second coming, this is the motive urged by St. John, with this in view, (and it was ever in view of the Church of the Apostolic age), he counsels us to abide in Christ that we may not be ashamed before Him at His coming. What a contingency is here hinted at ! To shrink with shame from Christ, to flee from Him, to seek to hide ourselves from Him at His coming ! Will any do this ? Alas ! multitudes ; multitudes in professing Christendom shall say in that day to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb ; for the great day of His wrath is come ; and who shall be

able to stand ?” Do you want to find yourselves amid that terrified multitude, who will shrink back abashed from Christ, who like Adam and Eve in Eden will seek to hide themselves from Him, but like them in vain, for the angels of God’s power shall bring them in their guilt before Christ’s judgment throne ? Do you, I say, want to find yourselves among that alarmed, despairing, craven crew ? You answer, No. Then come to Christ now. Abide in Him now, and you will not be ashamed before Him at His coming ; you will not be ashamed, because in that mighty Judge, coming in His majesty, you will see your Saviour and your Friend.

Oh how blessed not to be ashamed before Christ at His coming ! Oh how blessed to be able to welcome His Advent, to be able to say as we see Him coming again, “ Lo this is our God ; we have waited for Him, and He will save us : this is the Lord ; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” May this great blessedness be yours and mine, dear friends. And to this end, may you and I abide in Him, and then, when He shall appear, we shall not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

